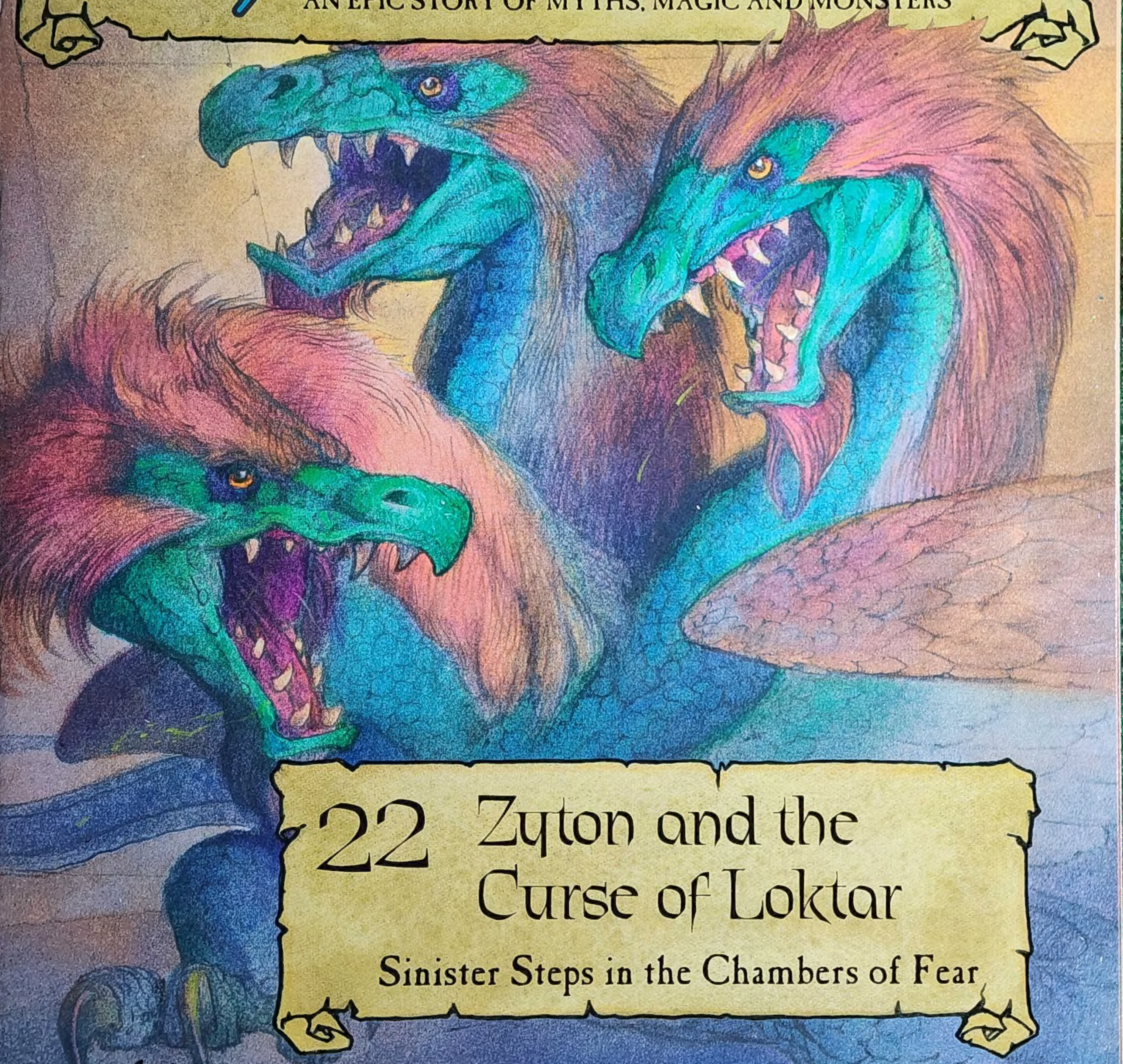
A MARSHALL CAVENDISH COLLECTION 22 IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS



22 Zyton and the Curse of Loktar

Sinister Steps in the Chambers of Fear

Julek Heller

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From a story by Frank Graves

On the Twenty-Second Day . . .

Deep in geometric gloom
Do not open long-sealed tomb.
The curse of Evil then will fall,
Not on one, but surely all.
Seek instead the golden prize
That evil guards with six-fold eyes.
Follow where alone he goes.
Above, the prize. Below, who knows?

Numbed by Melek's sudden disappearance, Richard and Orkan gaped open-mouthed at the slide down which he had vanished. As they stared, there came the grinding of stone against stone and the slab tilted up into its former position, locking into place with a heavy click. The hillside looked just as it had before – a seemingly natural formation of eroded rock strata.

Orkan was the first to move, prodding and pulling at the ground in search of the hidden passageway.

"If you go on like that," Richard warned, you'll end up disappearing like Melek! We don't know how that trap was sprung and there could be more waiting for us."

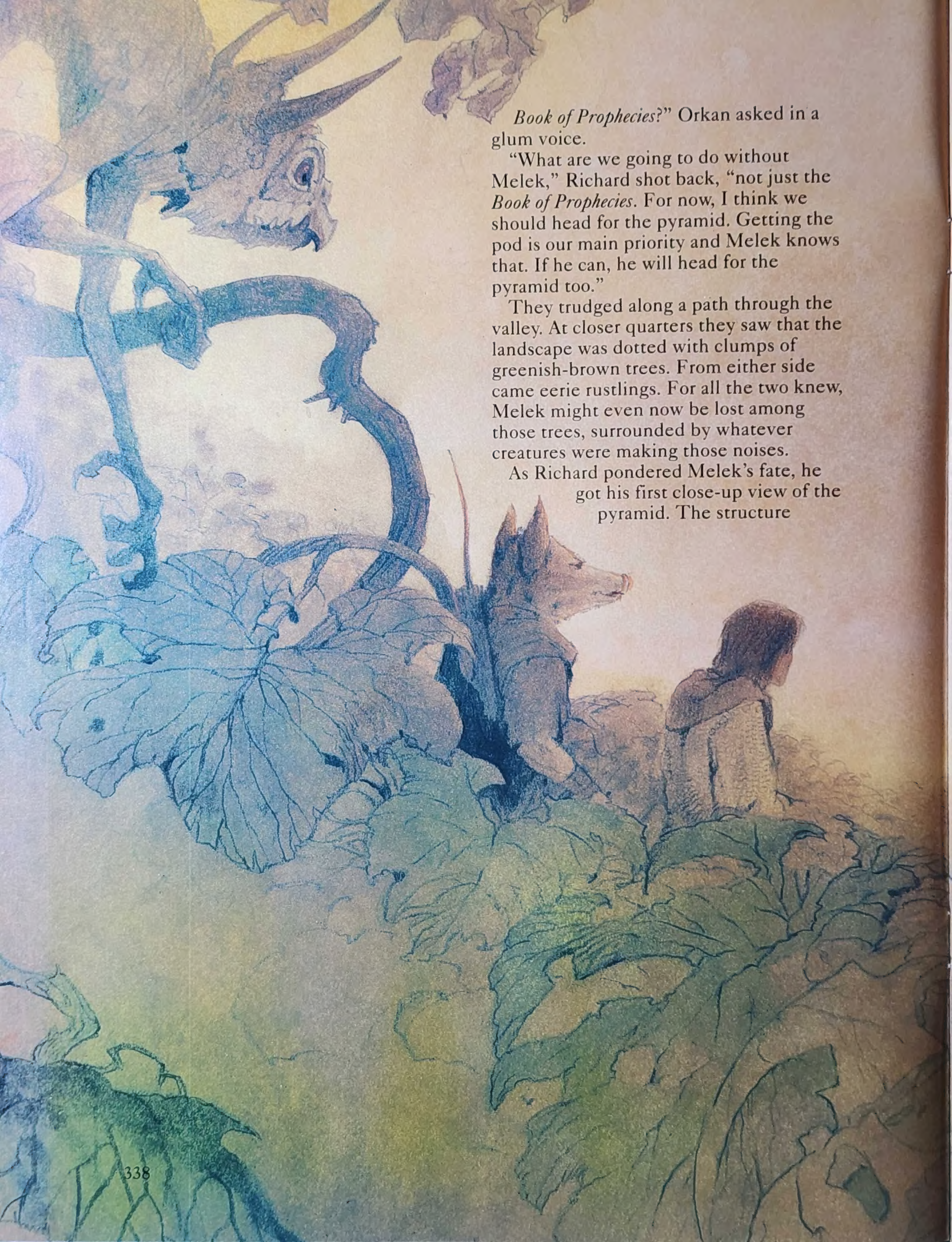
Richard and Orkan started checking the ground where Melek last stood. At every moment they were prepared to throw themselves to one side in case they sprung a trap. Then Richard spotted Melek's glasses. He picked them up and they searched the area with renewed vigour. Still they could find nothing that would gain them entry to the secret passage.

Fruitless search

Reluctantly, the two walked on down the hill until they reached the valley floor. They scouted the immediate area, inspecting every nook and cranny for clues. It was as if the earth had swallowed the scribe and his books.

Eventually they had no choice but to abandon their search and move on.

"What are we going to do without the



Book of Prophecies?" Orkan asked in a glum voice.

"What are we going to do without Melek," Richard shot back, "not just the *Book of Prophecies*. For now, I think we should head for the pyramid. Getting the pod is our main priority and Melek knows that. If he can, he will head for the pyramid too."

They trudged along a path through the valley. At closer quarters they saw that the landscape was dotted with clumps of greenish-brown trees. From either side came eerie rustlings. For all the two knew, Melek might even now be lost among those trees, surrounded by whatever creatures were making those noises.

As Richard pondered Melek's fate, he got his first close-up view of the pyramid. The structure

soared smooth-sided from the ground, its architectural precision standing in sharp contrast to the rough landscape around it. It was clad in sheets of polished amber, whose translucent surfaces shone golden in the sun.

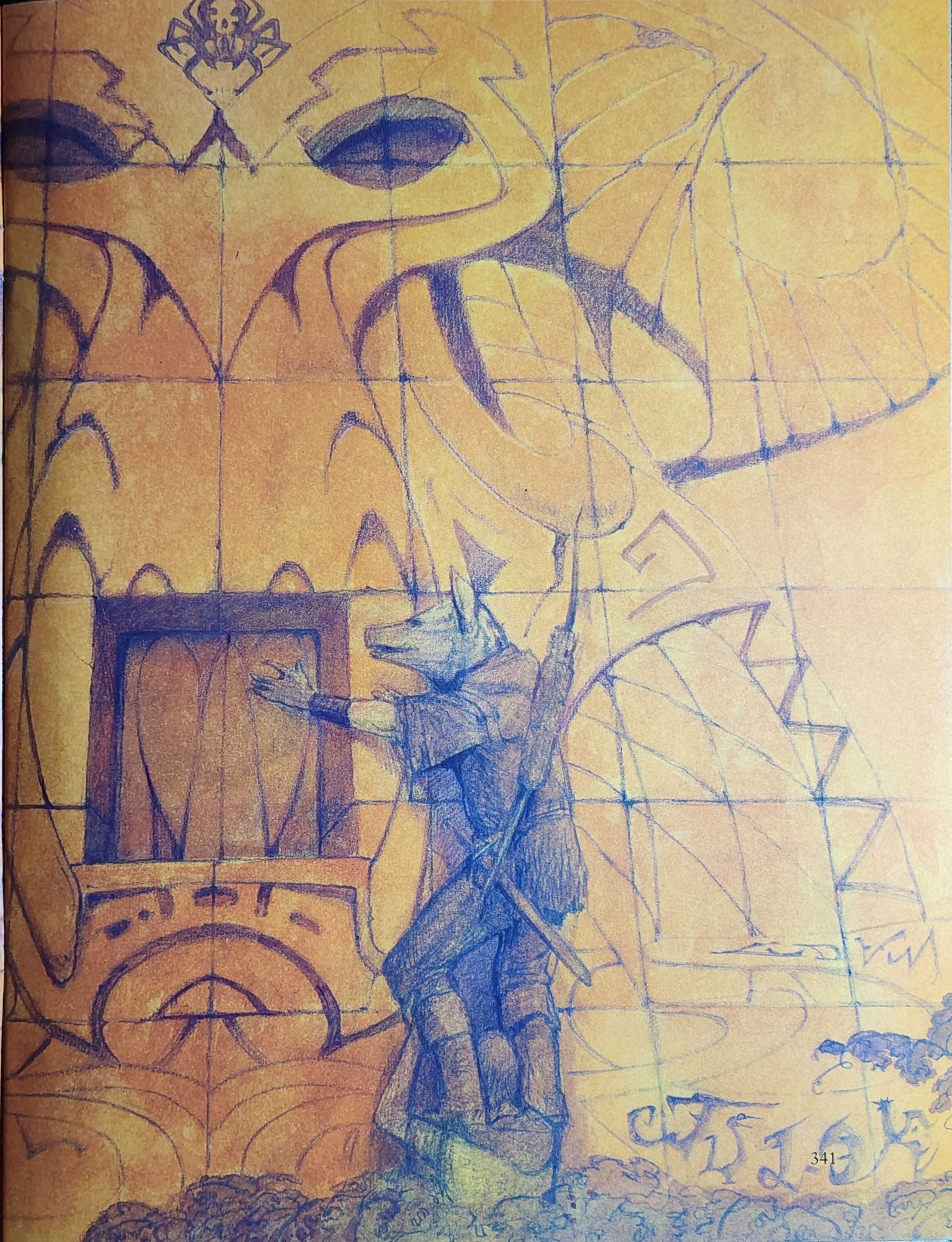
As they drew nearer, Richard and Orkan saw that the blocks around the base of the pyramid were carved with angular hieroglyphics.

Richard took out the Path Finder and walked round the pyramid searching for an entry. The arrow indicated a slab at the bottom of one of the pyramid's sloping faces. He and Orkan pushed on it, but no matter how hard they pressed, searching for a hidden catch, the amber slabs remained seamless.

"The pod's in there," Richard said, "but the entrance is hidden. Orkan, where would you put a door so that people wouldn't find it?"

"Where they couldn't get at it," Orkan said. "Maybe higher up the pyramid?"

They shielded their eyes and peered up the gleaming slope. Just above their heads a section of amber looked out of place. It receded slightly from the others and was set within an image that was different from the other carvings. Orkan climbed on to Richard's shoulders and felt around the carving. There came a click and the amber slab slid sideways.



With one smooth movement, Orkan swung himself into the opening then reached down to haul Richard up after him. They found themselves in a stone lobby whose floor was covered with dust. A heavy, stone door was set in the far wall. Richard and Orkan were halfway across the lobby when they heard a deep rumbling sound. The floor beneath them was sinking in a solid block.

Into the tomb chamber

It was like being in a high-speed lift. For a moment Richard and Orkan felt as if their feet were going to lose contact with the floor. Their stomachs lurched as they plummeted down into the dark.

There was no way of telling how far they had travelled when a welcome heaviness within them signalled that they were losing speed. There came a steady crunching of stone against stone and then they stopped altogether.

Richard and Orkan were at one end of a cavernous chamber, whose walls gave off a strange amber glow. At the other end of the room squatted a slope-sided block of stone topped by a flat lid. They had gained access to the heart of the pyramid – its tomb chamber.

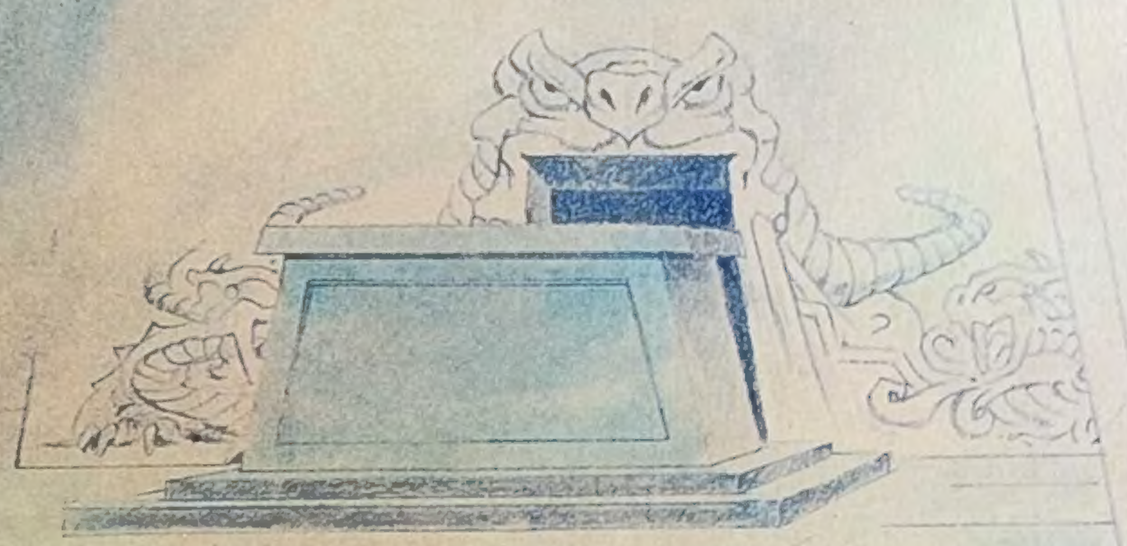
"The pod must be in the tomb," Richard said without consulting the Path Finder. "Let's hope there's an easy way into it."

They stepped off the platform that had brought them there and, as soon as they were clear, it shot back through the ceiling to the lobby above.

As far as Richard could see there was no other way out of the room. Their only hope was that the tomb itself would provide an exit.

They walked up to the tomb. Its surface was covered with figures and symbols.

"There must be a catch somewhere,"



Richard murmured as he started to feel his way over the carvings.

Suddenly, Orkan grabbed Richard's arm.

"What's that?" he whispered.

Three-headed monster

The warrior's keen ears had picked up a dry, rustling sound from the opposite side of the chamber.

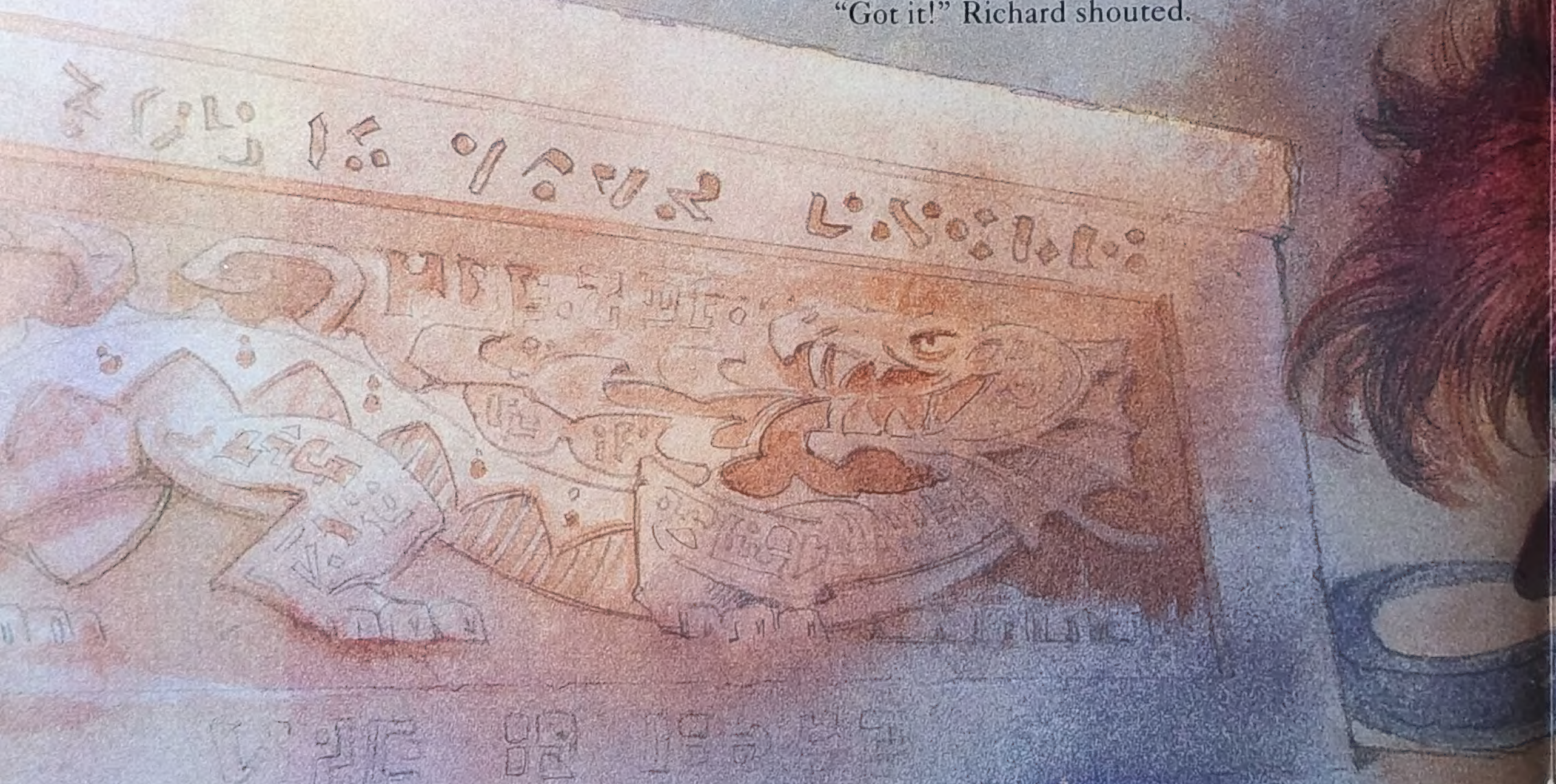
"You carry on searching," Orkan said. "I'll go and see what it is." He drew his sword and slid quietly round the corner of the tomb. Advancing towards the centre of the room was a strange creature, half-bird and half-reptile. Its lower body was that of an iguana, but a pair of wings sprouted from its shoulders. Three separate necks, scaly at the base, became more feathery towards the top and each ended in a head equipped with a curving, toothy beak and glittering gimlet eyes.

The creature spotted Orkan at once and its expression turned vicious. The three heads jerked backwards as the beast surged into attack.

"Get back quick!" Orkan shouted to Richard.

Even as Orkan spoke, Richard pressed a bulbous outcrop on the tomb's side. The lid slid slowly back.

"Got it!" Richard shouted.



The monster's six eyes had widened in horror as the tomb opened. Orkan stared as his former foe backed off, turned tail and fled, disappearing as if by magic through the far wall.

"What did you do?" Orkan asked.

"I just opened the lid," Richard replied. "What's wrong?"

Melek returns

Orkan was telling Richard what had happened when they heard a grating sound. Then the stone platform thumped to the ground. A small figure stepped off and the lift whizzed back up.

"Richard, Orkan, are you there?" a voice cried out.

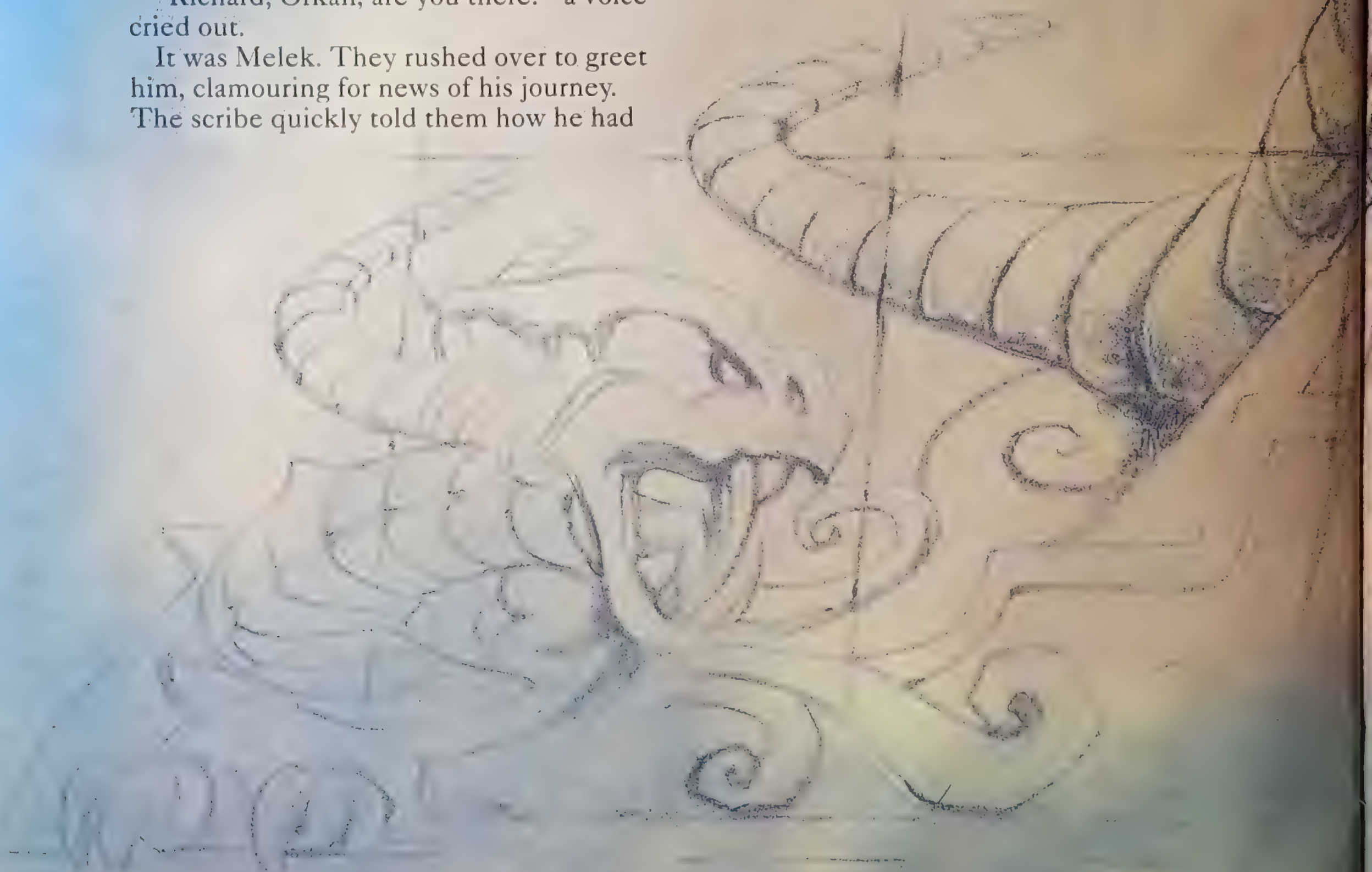
It was Melek. They rushed over to greet him, clamouring for news of his journey. The scribe quickly told them how he had fallen through a trapdoor into a maze of tunnels. Then, more by luck than skill, he had found his way out and consulted the *Book of Prophecies*.

"I came to the pyramid as fast as I could," he said. "I wanted to stop you before it was too late." Melek sat down and read out the verse from the book.

"I wonder what the curse is?" Richard said as the scribe closed the book.

"Well," Melek began, "I managed to decipher the inscriptions on the pyramid's outer wall. . ."

"You could read them?" Richard interrupted.



"Of course," Melek said. "This is the tomb of Loktar and it is guarded by Zyton, a three-headed monster. Opening the tomb sets off a self-destruct mechanism. The pyramid will sink into the ground, taking with it Loktar and whoever dared open his tomb." Melek looked at their horror-struck faces.

"You haven't opened the tomb, have you?" Melek asked shakily.

Hand of Loktar

Richard and Orkan nodded and turned towards the tomb. Already the lid had slid more than halfway off and a dank haze was rising from inside. They ran over and tried to shove the heavy stone slab back to its former position. Their efforts were useless. The lid continued to grind open. The smell that came from the tomb was beyond description.

"Let's get out of here," Richard shouted. "We'll follow the creature that Orkan saw. It had six eyes. Where did he go out?" Richard asked Orkan.

Orkan led Richard and Melek to the wall through which Zyton had escaped. A zig-zag crack ran from floor to ceiling. It was a door of some sort, but how did it open? Suddenly Orkan gave a shout. On the floor, some little way from the wall, was a worn patch of stone.

Orkan stepped on it and the wall slid apart to reveal a flight of steps. They rushed through the gap. As they did so, they heard a noise from Loktar's tomb. Once through, Richard searched around for the closing mechanism. A horned emblem was carved on the floor. Richard pressed down on it with his foot. The wall closed silently but just before it did Richard thought he saw a hand reaching out of the tomb.

The companions ran up the stairs in a

headlong rush. The steps were cold, hard and slithery with dust. Suddenly there came a rumble from the bottom of the stairs – the sound of the secret door being opened. The companions smelt the stench of Loktar's tomb at the same time as they heard the slow shuffle of his corpse coming towards them.

The stairs turned a corner and stopped abruptly in a wall of solid rock. There was no way out. The only route, as far as they could see, was back the way they had just come.

"It's a dead end!" Orkan shouted angrily. "Where can we go from here?"

Escape route

Richard took out the Path Finder. Its tip pointed upwards and was shining brighter than he had ever seen it. He looked at the ceiling and gave a shout of jubilation. There, above their heads, was a metal grille.

"That's our way out," he said.

He unwound Kika's belt from his waist. As soon as it was free, the belt shot up and wrapped itself around the bars. Then it began to lengthen. Richard held on to the end of the belt and hauled. Again, the belt helped him, bunching back on itself like a python to rip the grille free.

For a moment nothing happened, then the bars burst from the ceiling in a shower of stone and mortar. Richard wasted no time. He hooked his fingers round the edge of the hole and pulled himself up.

He found himself at the bottom of a tall shaft that reached up through the pyramid. At its end, far away, he saw a glimmer of blue sky. To one side, a pod glowed in a small niche. He snatched it up and wedged it into his pocket.

It was as if Richard had set the curse in motion. The pyramid gave a lurch and began to sink into the ground. Orkan and Melek yelled in terror and before Richard could lend them a hand they had both scrambled into the shaft. With them they brought the rank grave-odour of Loktar's approach.

Burning blast

"The curse! It's happening!" Orkan shouted. Already the pyramid was growling its way into the earth, with a noise that made normal speech impossible. Specks of loose mortar tumbled on to their heads.

"We've got to get up there," Richard shouted.

At that moment Loktar arrived beneath them. They saw a wrinkled face of incalculable antiquity staring up at them through dust-filled eyes. The pyramid lurched again, throwing Loktar off balance. He staggered sideways and slipped on the stairs. The trio heard his body slither down the treads.

Richard felt a rush of hot air from below. His first assumption was that something had caught fire in the pyramid's foundations. The wind strengthened and intensified until it was a burning, howling gale. The three clung to the walls but the searing hurricane was too strong. First Melek, then Richard and finally Orkan were blasted upwards like so many particles of soot.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

Look out for these friendly little creatures again. They are hiding somewhere in the illustrations in this issue.

In issue 21, Shoomi and Shoobi were hiding in two places – on pages 330 and 335.

3-Minute Challenge

Mask of Evil

A fragment of the Evil One's mask is hidden somewhere in the illustrations. Can you find it in less than three minutes?

In issue 21, the fragment was on page 323.
If you did not beat the challenge, try again this time.

Seal of Loktar

How many times can you spot Loktar's mysterious seal in the pages of this issue?

Monsters and Magic

After reading about Zyton and the curse of Loktar, find out about Dragons and Geryon on Morbane's story cards. Which of these monsters do you think Zyton is based on?

In issue 21, Stridor was based on Big Foot.

Check your answers in the next issue.

Puzzle Map

Cut out the map pieces and fit them on to your Ancestral World map poster.

Power of Evil

Cut out the letter block and keep it safe. In issue 26, a clue will be given to help you form all the letters into a phrase that reveals the source of the Evil One's power.

NB The competition will be open to residents of UK and Eire only.

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A Marshall Cavendish Collection
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In Fortnightly Parts
The Ancestral Trail
An Epic Story of Myths, Magic and Monsters
23 Dagmar, Demon of Fire
Flames of Fury over Yellow Stone Peaks
Julek Heller

In Issue 23

Dagmar, Demon of Fire

On their way to Yellow Stone Peaks, the trio are attacked by a fire-breathing monster. Will they survive the encounter, or will their efforts go up in smoke so near the final goal?

plus

- Morbane tells us about the Sphinx's mysterious challenge to travellers and about a ruthless fire-breathing monster.

- Another location recorder for **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game and a piece for the Ancestral World puzzle map.

Coming in Issue 24

Syrus, Spirit of the Sky

An evil genie whisks the companions off to his mountain-top lair. Can they escape from his clutches and start the return trek to the Ancestral City?

plus

From Morbane – two stories about creatures conjured up unwittingly • More tokens for the role-playing game • Another map piece.

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